

## Message Text

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13-11

ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7035

INFO DEA HQS WASHDC

RANGOON 5064

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

UNCLAS BANGKOK 1254

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SNAR, TH

SUBJ: PRESS ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS DRUG ABUSE PROBLEM

SUMMARY: A FRONT PAGE ARTICLE IN THE JANUARY 18 BANGKOK POST, HEADLINED " ALARMING INCREASE IN HEROIN ADDICTS", POINTS TO THE SERIOUS PROBLEM OF DRUG ABUSE IN THAILAND. THE ARTICLE IS BASED ON AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. ARUN CHAOWANASAI, A SPECIALIST IN THE TREATMENT OF ADDICTS. IT QUOTES THE DOCTOR AS CALLING FOR STRONG THAI GOVERNMENT ACTION TO DEAL WITH THE NARCOTICS PROBLEM. ALTHOUGH THE ARTICLE APPEARS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRESS, IT IS LIKELY TO BE READ BY KEY ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND MAY BE HELPFUL IN DRAWING THE ATTENTION OF THAI POLITICAL FIGURES TO THE DRUG ISSUE. END SUMMARY

1. THE LEAD STORY ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE JANUARY 18 BANGKOK POST IS HEADLINED " ALARMING INCREASE IN HEROIN ADDICTS" AND IS BASED ON AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. ARUN CHAOWANASAI, THE WIDELY RESPECTED HEAD OF THE PSYCHIATRIC UNIT AT PHRA MONGKHUT KLAO ARMY HOSPITAL IN BANGKOK.

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IN THE ARTICLE, DR. ARUN ESTIMATES THAT THE NUMBER OF

HEROIN ADDICTS IN THAILAND IS 300,000 AND INCREASING. SIGNIFICANTLY, ARUN CALLS FOR STRONG RTG ACTION TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE PROBLEM. ACCORDING TO THE ARTICLE, "DR. ARUN SAID BITTERLY THAT ALTHOUGH THE DRUG PROBLEM HAS REACHED A DANGEROUS LEVEL, THE GOVERNMENT PAYS LITTLE ATTENTION TO IT AND IGNORES THE MENACE WHICH HAS SERIOUS SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS SUCH AS A SPIRALLING CRIME RATE."

2. ARUN'S OTHER POINTS INCLUDE:

- ONE OUT OF EVERY 133 THAI IS A HEROIN ADDICT.
- INJECTION OF HEROIN CAUSES AT LEAST ON RECORDED DEATH A DAY.
- ADDICTION WITHIN THE RANKS OF THE THAI ARMY IS INCREASING, " WHICH CONSTITUTES A SERIOUS THREAT TO OUR NATIONAL DEFENCE AND SECURITY."
- 98 PERCENTS OF THAI ADDICTS ARE MEN, 2 PERCENTS WOMEN (ALL PROSTITUTES), MOST ADDICTS ARE UNDER 25 YEARS OF AGE, MANY ARE STUDENTS.
- THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD ENACT A LAW WHEREBY ADDICTS CAN BE COMMITTED FOR INSTITUTIONAL TREATMENT FOR A COMPULSORY PERIOD OF TIME.
- THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH HAS NOT YET TAKEN ACTION ON A PROPOSAL FOR AN OUTPATIENT METHADONE TREATMENT PROGRAM. (COMMENT: ARUN IS CORRECT, BUT THE BANGKOK METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT HAS ESTABLISHED A PILOT OUTPATIENT PROJECT AT ONE OF ITS HEALTH CENTERS.)

3. COMMENT: WHILE SOME OF ARUN 'S FACTS AND STATISTICS ARE OPEN TO QUESTION, THE PROMINENT PLAY GIVEN HIS REMARKS IS IMPORTANT. THE BANGKOK POST, ALTHOUGH AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE PAPER WITH LIMITED CIRCULATION, IS READ BY MANY INFLUENTIAL THAI, AND THE ARTICLE MAY HELP TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THE NARCOTICS PROBLEM ARUN-'S COMMENTS MAY ALSO BE TIMED TO COINCIDE WITH THE UPCOMING NATIONAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN. ARUN AND OTHER THAI SPECIALISTS WOULD LIKE TO SEE NARCOTICS BECOME A POLITICAL ISSUE WHICH WOULD ENERGIZE THE NEW GOVERNMENT TO TAKE STRONG ACTION.

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